

in the sand. Before the boarding party realized it the light-lying craft was whirling out of the cut into the fog-bound Atlantic.

At the same time that the cutter outside managed to touch off the mine, the long finger of rock with the electric siren, farthest out of the Gridiron reef, went up with a roar of dynamite, and the automatic braying ceased. But just before—a second too late to beat the blast—the destroyer launched a torpedo. Now out into the smoke where the rocks had been an ominous black form wriggled onward, as the all-en-shrouding vapor swept in over the sea, blotting out a man's hand before his face. A loaded Whitehead torpedo was loose in the fairway, in a "Barnegat blanket," the worst kind of black, blinding fog, with the foghorn silenced—and only two boys, white to the gills but unafraid, and a donkey, knew!

Quick as chain lightning to see things, those Barnegat boys were, or they wouldn't have spotted the runaway torpedo when it passed the blown-up reef. The revenue cutter and the torpedoboat on the other side of the reef could not see that it had missed; but Flotsam and Jetsam, unblinded by the smoke, had a clear view. They both saw and understood.

"That destroyer lammed out her Whitehead when the rev'noo blowed the rocks. I bet they both think they blowed 'em! Let 'er slide, Sam! We got to go now—we got to get that ole warhead!" they panted in chorus.

They let the catamaran "slide," once it got started, not even bothering about the steering oar. They could work her port and starboard a bit with the umbrella,

purpose—a desperate purpose, the mere thought of which might well have appalled any living beachman.

They dared not stop to alarm the life savers if they could. They knew the catamaran was headed straight for the wandering warhead; but there was no telling whether in that fog they or the Ships Bottom crew could pick up its course again. Groping aimlessly in that smother might mean destruction for any boat. Time pressed, and the boys knew they were "it."

"We got to get her an' hang on an' holler, 'fore some o' them war junks rams her." Little Flotsam gripped his pluck in both grimy hands. "The squad don't know where it's at—this muck, with the foghorn busted."

"Not one o' them fight ships knows she's loose, looks like: on'y us," Jetsam whispered. "She's goin' some, Sam; wheelin' it like that warhead. Don't you think we better git in that umbrel?"

"Fore she hits? Nix! If we do, the fleet's shark's meat. We got to overhaul that wild torp. Gee! an' she on'y needs a touch on the nose to—blim!" Flotsam shuddered in spite of his sturdy grit.

Somewhere in the blinding fog the skipjack boat was skimming through. Maybe right under foot—it made them crawl with the feel of it—a big Whitehead torpedo lay in wait in the smoldering tide waters, like a snake or a ground shark, with only a coppery nose showing, and loaded to the brass plunge-cap on the end with dynamite, melinite, or cordite enough to blow the biggest battleship of the squadron to Kingdom Come! With the tide running and the wind rising, there was no telling where they would find that terror of the sea. And only a touch on that ugly snout needed to send her off—

on 'em—they're all circling round," Flotsam said, manipulating the umbrella and peering to right and left. "Good thing that old foghorn ain't blowing; they'd come in."

"You'll hear some'n if they do!" said Jetsam, sprawled out flat on his stomach, trying with all his eyes to look under the steaming sea smoke.

"We got to find that ding old warhead—got to find her!" They kept on muttering it to screw up their courage. The black "smoke" on the water was almost as impenetrable as reeking grease. Once a shadowy fin slithered athwart the craft and their hearts jumped—a shark!

"Smells us!" Jetsam breathed. Centuries were passing for minutes.

"Or Quin—Great Mackerel, Sam! Stop 'im! Choke 'im! Gag 'im!" Equinox had seen the slithering fin of the shark and recognized it, and he scrambled up, bracing himself on his short legs, his ears and nose cocked heavenward as he lifted his voice in a succession of blaring, deep-toned brays that sounded over the water like the foghorn on the Gridiron, vitalized by fear. The boys jumped for him; but he backed away braying. At the same time the fog around the catamaran grew luminous and golden as a lighted stage; the warships in the distant semicircle swung their searchlights one after the other on the center of sound.

THE drama was on; but neither Flotsam nor Jetsam nor the quavering Quin dreamed that ten thousand hearts knew that they were daring death in the arena of the sea, and knowing, beat faster.

For the squadron knew now that the warhead was "alive." The squadron knew, as the boys had known all along, and the alarm had flashed forth to Ships Bottom as to every ship, that a terribly real danger menaced the North Atlantic fleet, with its millions of men and money.

In that second of alarm every mighty seafighter in the danger zone beat to quarters, as though in the presence of the enemy; wire-meshed torpedo nettings were flung round the warships, and the roused fleet, formed in a far-flung semicircle, faced in, while a score of searchlights and ten thousand anxious eyes were leveled on that luminous flare of fog off the Gridiron Reef.

From the shore the white storm fighter of Ships Bottom, already on the alert, stole out with padded tenders over the side; from the fleet the daring revenue cutter felt her way forward, launching from her bow dock as she came the one naval craft that might dare explore the lair of the lurking death where Flotsam and Jetsam, alone and unprotected, were scouting in their ramshackle catamaran, with Quin for ballast.

A bell-mouthed siren, wailing to seaward, mingled with Quin's mournful bray. It startled the boys, jumping their hearts higher.

"Soun's like the Dago—the darn donk's toln' her in on us!" Jetsam quavered.

"They've took us for the Grid, along o' Quin's talkin'!" Flotsam shrieked. "They can't raise us in this fog. They can't see it!"

"Listen, Sam!"

Out of the siren call came a dithering splash, as of a great sea fowl skimming the sea and soaring. Higher it rose with the wail of the siren, beating a muffled volley as of buzzing birds' wings, boring onward into the focus of light. A shadow thickened, then a gray mass loomed overhead, like a great ghostly bird in the cadmium beams, with long, thin legs like claws tucked fore and aft, dripping sea water. Flotsam and Jetsam gave a shout of envious recognition.

"She's the hydroplane from the 'Dago, huntin' the torp!"

"She's right behind you! For Gawd sake watch out!" The shrill yell capping their shout came to the boys, a yell clipped short by the ourushing hydroplane, swallowed with its rider in the fog. Flotsam and Jetsam stood staring, their eyes on the sea, their faces pallid in the glare of the searchlights. For the terror had come, turning on them when they weren't looking!

OUT of the circle of light the iron shape swallowed up like a wounded shark, a scant boat's length away—an ugly iron head with a shen of copper on its nose, slaying sea water, with the lance thrust of an automatic screw astern, making its last kick. Behind them the wail of the revenue cutter's siren grew louder.

"That's her! That's the old warhead! An' here comes the 'Dago—snorin' head down on us!"

Flotsam flung himself flat on the raft, stretching out his stubby arms to fend off the torpedo all wet and huge and blinking evil.

"Chuck us Quin's halter, Sam!" he gasped. "That hydroplane can't swing round an' git back in time. We got to swing her, clear o' the old 'Dago!"

"Or hang on an' holler! Which end does she shoot out o'?"

"Hang 't I know! Hush!" Flotsam's eye was on the big brass cap shining on the warhead's nose. Big as the blazing sun of noonday it looked, and wicked. Only a tap—his stomach went cold. But behind him the Onondaga's siren boomed like a dirge. The good old 'Dago!

For no other ship in the navy would Flotsam and



"A gray mass loomed overhead like a great ghostly bird."

soon as they got out far enough. For a long minute while the boat bored through the muck the three sat staring; Flotsam and Jetsam in their faded Jerseys and knickers, and tiny Quin, squatting back on his haunches, a frayed rope, souvenir of some bootless attempt to make him work or fast, dangling from his shaggy neck.

LONG JOHNSON, of Ships Bottom crew, on patrol, heard a braying voice raised in protest, traversing the inlet in the smother, and made a beeline for the life saving station, spreading the alarm.

"It's them crazy kids, Flotsam an' Jetsam, gone out with the tide," he said. "An' Quin! The catamaran's carryin' 'em, an' they're carryin' the donk out to sea; an' they got a old umbrella for a sail. Jump, Fellers!"

It was the kind of alarm and the kind of weather to make the life savers jump. But Johnson was wrong about the boys being washed to sea against their wills, shanghaied by the catamaran. Only Quin was the victim of Fate: Flotsam and Jetsam were choke full of

the rap of the home-made catamaran! No wonder little Flotsam said "Blim!"

But the lads held on. Sons of the Service, they were, bound by the law of self sacrifice where ships and lives lay in peril. And here were many—and the time was short. And they dared not call out, for fear of setting boats in motion, round that terror.

"She'll boost 'em, all right—less she boosts us first, an' Quin. It was Quin buckin' set us loose," said Jetsam, getting his breath. "No wonder he looks scared!"

Poor Equinox! He only knew he had been kidnapped, and he did not like this blind man's bluff at sea any more than the boys did. He sat with drooping ears, listening to the tooting and smothering of the fog-bound fleet and the dim boom of the Gridiron somewhere off in the smother, wondering what had become of that strange sea burro which always lifted up his voice in the fog, and more than half minded to call to him for companionship.

"If the lop picks up, it'll lam that warhead right out